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As American and Russian diplomats greeted one another with heavy looks and heavy talk in Geneva, another winged "diplomat" from the tundras of Russia had landed lightly in America. In Nebraska, to be precise.

His family name is Middendorf. He is big and gray, but not heavy. He is a Russian Middendorf bean goose, to be precise, with a yellowish-orange band around his bill that distinguishes him easily from his white-fronted American goose brothers.

As the papers have been breathlessly telling us, he was about 8,000 miles off course when he landed at the DeSoto Wildlife Refuge north of Omaha on Dec. 29, just before the Russians and Americans finally began meeting in Switzerland to talk about disarmament. Middendorf — that is what we shall call him — claims his "territory" from the Arctic coast of Siberia to southern China; the latter, of course, in the wintertime.

Now, many may think that the unexpected arrival of Middendorf is some sort of accident. A goose loose in the world. Really! A Russian goose, 8,000 miles off track, just as the disarmament talks started in Geneva? How naive do they think we are?

Since Middendorf landed precipitously in Omaha — delighting native Nebraskans, who heretofore had seen only native American geese, and confusing official Washington — there have been several urgent theories traveling around the nation's capital as to who Middendorf is and what he represents.

Does anyone really think it is an accident that Middendorf landed in Omaha, the home of the Strategic Air Command? Oh, the wildlife refuge is a good cover, but we were not born yesterday, comrades!

Then there is unquestionably the disinformation part of it all. The clever Russkis know exactly how

A loose goose!

Mystery shrouds Russian's flight

Americans will react to a beautiful foreign goose like this; they know we will travel hundreds of miles to see it and then lapse into our typical American solipsism, exclaiming: "Look, a friendly Russian goose! That means the Russians are really just like us."

The psychic followup to that is: "Of course we can talk to them in Geneva. Just look at that friendly Russian goose."

Attention will then be diverted away from all those heavy men, in their heavy overcoats, shaking their heavy jowls, eating their heavy wienerschnitzels, and threatening with their heavy weap-

ons. Who, indeed, would not rather look at a beautiful Russian goose than at them?

The next "lesson" that the Russian disinformation folks were planning when they gave Middendorf his flying orders is also quite obvious: His unorthodox flight was to prove to the innocent Americans that all their government's talk about Russians not being able to leave Mother Russia at will is just

propaganda. Middendorf, after all, could have been in southern China now, but he just took off on his own and winged it to Omaha. What better proof do you need that Russians are even freer and more mobile than Americans?

It is my personal conviction, although I cannot totally confirm it, that the Middendorf trip was decided upon after the immense success of fashionable Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in England only weeks ago. My contention arises out of the fact that, immediately upon his arrival in Omaha, Middendorf showed off his plumage to everyone.

Middendorf, said Thomas F. Prusa, the assistant wildlife manager at the refuge, "is strutting around, sleeping, and

preening. We're not expecting cold weather for several days, so he'll likely stay until then."

The final proof of Middendorf's perfidy (if more is needed!) lies in the fact that Mr. Prusa then noted that if Middendorf stayed with a flock of white-fronted

American geese, he would end up not in southern China (where Russians, as we know, are no longer appreciated) but in the Gulf of Mexico.

And we all know what the Russians are doing in Central America, right? We all know what the insertion of a "mole" named Middendorf into Nicaragua could mean, don't we?

Much is being written about Geneva — about all those incredible earthly and unearthly systems — but the most practical warning about these initial talks is that most of the men there don't understand the systems much better than we ordinary mortals do. But everybody can understand a goose named Middendorf, right?

What a perfect foil!

The thing that initially was so disturbing about Geneva was the air of conspiracy and suspicion among both sets of leaders. Thank God that conspiratorial air has not affected the rest of us.

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